3 Nationalism without a Nation: Understanding the Dress of Somali Women in Minnesota

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In the 1990s, migration to Minnesota from Africa grew by more than 600 percent.[1] A large proportion of these newcomers were from Somalia. When their national government collapsed in 1991, many Somalis fled the country for refugee camps in other parts of East Africa. Today, they live in a worldwide diaspora—in Kenya, Saudi Arabia, Italy, the United Kingdom, the United States, Finland, and Australia, along with many other countries. The metropolitan area of Minneapolis–St. Paul (the "Twin Cities") has become home to the largest community of Somalis in the United States—an estimated thirty to forty thousand people.[2]

Many immigrants in the Twin Cities have styles of "ethnic dress" that are worn for special events: weddings and funerals, the Chinese New Year, or the Festival of Nations in downtown St. Paul. Somalis, however, have taken a more deliberate approach to dress. Like the Amish and Hasidic Jews, many Somalis wear ethnic dress not just for holidays but every day. This is particularly true of Somali women, who are far more likely to wear the *jilbab* or *garbasaar* than a pair of blue jeans. A number of women (and even a few men) have filed lawsuits against their employers for the right to wear what they believe is appropriate to their religion (Islam) and Somali culture. Why is clothing so important to this group of people?

For Somali refugees, a strong sense of collective identity—projected through clothing—is almost all they have left of their nation. Unable to return to, or in many cases even to visit their homeland (which is still involved in a violent civil war), Somalis use clothing to keep their memories and dreams alive and to shape the future of a new Somali nation. The strength of their approach lies in the fact that Somalis have a long history of connecting dress with nationalism. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, clothing for both men and women was used as a visual symbol of resistance against the colonial governments of British and Italian Somaliland. Later, in the 1970s and '80s, Somalis turned to religion and religious dress (particularly that of women) as a means of resisting the oppressive dictatorship of Siad Barre, and as part of a trend toward revivalism and political transformation throughout the Islamic world. Rather than viewing the dress of Somali women in the Twin Cities simply as a case of "ethnic dress," I would argue that it needs to be understood in this historical context of nationalist movements.

Conceptualizing National Dress

The concept of national dress is nearly as old as the concept of the nation. Reminiscing about the American Revolution in 1856 (perhaps because of the approaching Civil War), Mary Fry wrote an article to the *Ladies Repository* demanding, "Let Us Have a National Costume." Rebuking other Americans for buying European fashions when their parents and grandparents had fought so hard to gain independence from Great Britain, she wondered,

> Is it true that Americans . . . have already become so incompetent, so utterly wanting in the article of ingenuity, that they can not even contrive to model for themselves a costume at once neat, comfortable, and elegant; and which might be regarded by other nations as something of an index to their professed democratic principles?[3]

In the 1800s and early 1900s, a series of revolutions, the Napoleonic wars, and two world wars created an interest in national dress in many parts of Europe, including Norway (which seceded from Sweden), Scotland, Germany, France, and Russia. In the late 1950s, ambassadors from the newly independent nations of Ghana and Nigeria wore variations of "national dress" to the United Nations. Their abandonment of the three-piece suit was a striking visual symbol of transformation from colonial to independent state. At the same time, their specific choices of dress—*kente* cloth and the *agbada*—revealed new sources of identity and tension. The agbada was a style of Nigerian dress that combined elements of clothing from the Hausa and Yoruba. Although it would have been challenging to incorporate even more ethnic symbolism, this "national dress" excluded other groups such as the Igbo and highlighted their marginalization in national politics. In the 1970s, the governments of Nigeria and Zaire banned citizens from importing, buying, or wearing Western styles of dress. The ban was intended to instill national pride, but also to bolster the national economy by supporting local industries and blocking the outflow of money to Europe and India for the purchase of clothing and textiles.

Among scholars who study textiles and clothing, interest in nationalism and national dress is much more recent. In a 1993 article titled "Eurocentrism in the Study of Ethnic Dress," Suzanne Baizerman, Joanne Eicher, and Catherine Cerny offered one of the first critiques and definitions of the concept of "national costume":

> The emergence of the term can be correlated with political and social developments of nineteenth and twentieth century Europe, a time of considerable upheaval precipitated by the Industrial Revolution. The establishment of national dress signified political and/or social autonomy of a people becoming embedded in the romanticism of the period. The term reflected attempts to preserve cultural traditions and social institutions threatened by increasing modernization. Sentiment and nostalgia surrounding national dress reinforced efforts to perpetuate national identity.[4]

In her book *The Study of Dress History* (published in 2002), Lou Taylor divided examples from a more comprehensive review of dress literature into three basic categories: "national struggle," "national cultural revival," and "commodified national dress." She argued that national dress comes from an "urban, politicized, elitist and educated" source, and that "the process of inventing a 'national' dress usually involves the appropriation of peasant styles as romanticized and utopian icons of democratic struggle and national cultural revival."[5] This has largely been true in Europe (which is where almost all of Taylor's examples come from), but I believe the case of Somali dress points to another possibility—nationalism without a nation.

Somali national dress has not emerged as a "romantic" or "utopian" symbol, but reflects a series of real attempts by ordinary people to foster social, economic, and political change. This process has not been particularly "elite" or even very organized, but it has been flexible and strong enough to survive the civil war and loss of the nation. With the collapse of the central government in Somalia, nationalism has actually become more important than ever. No one can take Somali identity or the future of a Somali nation for granted. Somali dress practices clearly fall within the parameters of "national dress"—but it is national dress unlike that which is typically investigated by other scholars.

A History of Somalia and Somali Dress

Much of the Horn of Africa is a desert. Because of this, the economy was traditionally based on pastoralism. For centuries, Somalis traveled with their herds of camels and sheep between pastures in the interior and market towns along the coastline. Trade along the northern coast is described in *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea,* a Greco-Egyptian shipping manual from the first century A.D.,[6] but many additional towns were built beginning in the tenth century A.D. by Arab and Persian settlers. Somalis controlled caravan trade to the interior. In this way, they were able to exchange "pastoral and wild products such as ghee, skins, gum, incense, ostrich feathers, ivory and livestock for grain and clothing."[7] Even so, many Somalis wore clothing made of leather instead of cloth. They processed the material themselves, using hides from their own livestock.[8]

This began to change in the early 1800s when trade to and from East Africa intensified. After the sultan of Oman established his court on the island of Zanzibar in 1832, the selling price of ivory tripled.[9] The slave trade was also greatly expanded, but Somalis were largely protected from being captured as slaves by their early and widespread conversion to Islam (since fellow believers cannot be owned). Profits from the sale of ivory and livestock (which was used by the British to provide food for growing colonies around the Indian Ocean as well as raw materials for shoe and leather industries back home) allowed Somalis to begin investing in larger volumes of cloth, clothing, and jewelry. Although men and women both wore ornaments for ritual purposes (often leather pouches containing verses from the Qur'an), women wore the more valuable pieces of jewelry—manufactured in Arabia and the coastal towns from materials such as silver, amber, coral, and carnelian—both as decoration and as a form of portable wealth.[10] Neighboring groups of pastoralists, such as the Oromo and Rendille (who lived further inland), were not as involved in coastal trade and continued wearing leather well into the twentieth century.[11]

With the invention of the steamship and opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, increasing amounts of cloth from Europe and even the United States began to pour in.[12] Being in a strategic position along the Gulf of Aden, Somali territory was quickly divided into five separate colonies by the governments of Britain, France, Italy, and Ethiopia. The Horn of Africa is also less than one hundred miles from the Arabian Peninsula. By the 1800s, the city of Mecca had become not only a center for pilgrimage, but the center of a growing Islamic resistance to British and French imperialism. Traveling from many different parts of the world, including Yemen, Iraq, Pakistan, Egypt, and the Sudan, pilgrims often remained in Mecca for months or even years to conduct business and advance their religious and political education.

Mohammed Abdulle Hassan, a Somali who became the leader of an armed resistance movement against the British, made the pilgrimage to Mecca when he was in his early thirties and remained there as a student for three years.[13] Hassan spent much of his time with a Sudanese scholar involved in Mahdism—a movement to end British rule and establish a government based on Islamic law. Filled with a new sense of conviction, his objectives upon returning home were "to inveigh strongly against the prevailing laxity in religious practice and revive 'the religious spirit in his people' [and] to fight excessive materialism and consumerism." In his efforts to build a more nationalist consciousness, he urged Somalis not to be seen

> "wearing 'infidel clothing,' sporting foreign hair styles, 'walking' like an unbeliever, or exhibiting outlandish manners of any sort." He further objected to "studying the books of unbelievers or participating in their gatherings or festivals," for this could be "confused too easily with love for them." This was tantamount to advocating a boycott of the British.[14]

By the year 1900, Hassan had persuaded six thousand men to join his army.[15] As word of the resistance spread, the number of "dervishes" continued to grow. (The word "dervish" also commonly refers to a person involved in Islamic mysticism.) As a symbol of the army's commitment to religious nationalism, the soldiers were given turbans (which were unusual for Somalis) along with uniforms that closely resembled the clothing worn by pilgrims at Mecca.

> The Dervishes were issued at the outset with a simple uniform consisting of three measures of white American or Indian cloth . . . two to be wrapped or worn around the body while one served as a head-dress. As a result of this, [they] were known as *Duub-ʿAd,* men of the white turbans. A black or brown rosary went with the plain, loosely fitting white robes.[16]

After five years, the army of British Somaliland gave up on fighting Hassan and retreated back to the coastline. The British were not completely defeated, but their expansion into the interior of Somali territory was halted until the 1920s.

Although popular in many parts of Somaliland, Hassan's armed resistance was not universally accepted. His rigid views on religion and the British angered many leaders of other established religious orders[17] as well as merchants involved in the import/export trade. Hassan could also be brutal to Somalis who opposed him and his army. Even so, this was not the only nationalist movement. Other Sufi leaders defied the British and Italian governments by building schools and promoting the authority of Islamic law. Religion was commonly viewed as a means of resistance against colonial rule. Nearly all of the photographs I have seen from the early to mid-1900s show Somalis wearing styles of dress from the Middle East—either wrapper sets (worn by pilgrims in the city of Mecca as well as Bedouins in southern Arabia[18]) or simple tailored styles such as *saalwar qamis* (a style of dress that includes pants with a long tunic and is still very popular in Arabia and South Asia today). Very few photographs show Somalis wearing European-style clothing.

Somalia became an independent nation in 1960, but sizeable numbers of Italian and British expatriates continued to live in the country. In much of the region, wrappers of plain white cloth were exchanged for lightweight, colorful new imports from India and Japan. These textiles were used for a new style of clothing: a loose-fitting dress called *dirac* with a long piece of cloth called garbasaar that could be used to cover the entire head and body. (The term *garbasaar* may be related to the Indian *sari*, a wrapped garment made from similar fabrics.) In urban areas such as the capital, Mogadishu, Western fashions began to filter in. In a life history published in 1994, one Somali woman (using the pseudonym "Aman") described her experiences in Mogadishu after living in the countryside.

> One night one of my friends took me to a party. There were a lot of handsome men there. There were a couple of whites there too, even though the party was mainly for Somalis—all of them were well educated, and the majority worked in banks or in big offices for the government. . . . I was embarrassed at the way I looked—my clothes, my hair—my dress and the way I acted weren't like the other girls. . . . The girls here didn't wear sarongs like we did in [the village]. Their dresses were sewn together, shorter, prettier. They even had better shoes—European shoes I had never seen before.[19]

Overall, Western styles of dress were more popular for men than women. One barrier to their acceptance among women was the Western fashion for miniskirts in the 1960s and '70s. A woman who exposed too much of her body was in danger of shaming her family by being labeled a prostitute. A police division called the *buona costuma* (good costume) was created to monitor prostitution and Somali women's dress.[20] An immigrant in Minneapolis told me how she had once been arrested as a teenager for wearing a miniskirt. When her father (who worked for the government and was mortified at having to post bail for his daughter) arrived at the station, he specifically forbade her to ever wear a miniskirt again.[21] (When we met she was modestly dressed in a long skirt and a head covering.) "Aman" was also arrested for wearing Western fashions.

> He said . . . he had to arrest me because I was a *sharmuuto* [prostitute], I was wearing a short skirt. I was bad for the city, I was a shame to the city, so he had to clean me out. I *was* wearing a short dress with a shawl, but even if I had been a prostitute, he didn't have the right to slap me and kick me.[22]

In 1969, the government of Somalia was overthrown in a military coup and Siad Barre was installed as a dictator. Under his leadership the country became embroiled in the Cold War, siding with the Soviet Union in order to counter American support for the Ethiopian regime of Haile Selassie. Although Islam and the Sufi brotherhoods were still critically important to many Somalis, Barre tried to secularize the government by basing it on scientific socialism. This alienated many religious leaders. In the 1970s he used Soviet weapons in a failed attempt to capture the Ogaden region of Ethiopia, destabilizing parts of the country by creating thousands of internal refugees. Barre was increasingly suspicious of any opposition and started to imprison or even execute people he saw as a threat to his power. Educated people who could afford to do so often left for universities in Egypt, Italy, the United Kingdom, and the United States or went into exile.

A Somali woman now living in the Washington, D.C., area recounted to me how she had left Mogadishu in the early 1980s to attend college. Back home for a visit, she found that many people were returning to religion for moral support as well as a safe place to discuss politics—even Barre had to respect the sanctity of the mosque. More and more women were wearing new styles of dress from the Middle East, particularly a long overcoat called a *shuka* (a word used in other parts of East Africa as a generic reference to something that covers the body) and a scarf called a *khimar* that covers the neck and hairline. Although my informant had never covered her head when she was living in Somalia (and still does not), a man threw stones at her, saying that she was "ruining the country" by not dressing more religiously.[23]

These new styles of dress also indirectly reflected the growth of Islamism—a movement to resist or even overthrow corrupt secular governments and establish new ones based on Islamic law. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 was an early success of that movement. In the 1980s, Iranian activists began traveling to other parts of Central Asia, North Africa, and the Persian Gulf to promote the idea that Islamic dress should be worn as a symbol of political and social transformation.[24] In Jordan, Syria, and Palestine, the garment called shuka by Somalis is known as jilbab. In Iran, the combination of shuka and khimar is called *rupush-rusari*. Iranians may have traveled to Somalia, but it is more likely that Somalis encountered Islamism and the political use of dress when they traveled to parts of North Africa and the Middle East for the pilgrimage, to attend college, or to work as migrant laborers. It was also in this time period, for example, that Somali men began pairing button-down shirts with the *macawis*, a sarong-like garment worn by other Muslim migrant laborers from Malaysia and Indonesia.[25]

In the late 1980s, the government of Somalia became very unstable. Armed rebels took control of several cities. Siad Barre responded with a campaign of bombings and executions, but he was overthrown in January 1991.[26] In the chaos that followed, hundreds of thousands of people were killed in the fighting or starved

to death. Many people fled to refugee camps in Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Kenya with little more than the clothes on their backs. Some were able to sail across the Gulf of Aden and find refuge in Yemen; others went on the pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia and never returned home. Some of the first countries outside of the region to accept refugees were the former colonial powers of Italy and Great Britain, as well as members of the British Commonwealth such as Canada and Australia. The United States, which entered Somalia under "Operation Restore Hope" but was forced to retreat after an embarrassing failed mission in which eighteen soldiers were killed, did not accept refugees until 1994.

Somali Women's Dress in Minneapolis–St. Paul

As part of immigration and social service reforms in the early 1990s, the U.S. government decided to settle new refugees in many parts of the country to keep areas such as New York and California from being overwhelmed. Some Somalis were directed to Minneapolis–St. Paul because churches and non-profit agencies there already had significant experience with refugee resettlement, having sponsored thousands of Hmong, Vietnamese, and Oromo refugees in the 1970s and '80s. Finding a good educational system and relatively affordable housing, the initial community of Somalis in Minneapolis–St. Paul grew rapidly. In the economic boom of the late 1990s it was also relatively easy to find jobs for people who couldn't speak English. Many Somalis left other parts of the country in order to join friends and family members in the Twin Cities.

Other residents of Minneapolis–St. Paul are often curious about why Somalis dress the way they do. In my experience they tend to assume that all Somali women dress in the same "traditional" way, but there are actually several major forms of dress within the community. Most Somali men and boys wear button-down shirts, pants, and jackets, which are generally loose-fitting and modest, but not unusual compared to mainstream clothing in Minnesota. A common interpretation of the Qur'an is that men should cover everything from their midsection to their knees. Women are expected to wear clothing that covers everything but their hands and face. Although a majority of women in Somalia did not cover themselves to this extent, a renewed focus on religion (as a way to cope with the stresses of migration, living in a non-Muslim country, and trying to build a new Somali nation) means that few Somali women in Minnesota are able to wear ordinary styles of American dress. The exception to this is outerwear such as sweaters, mittens, and heavy coats, which are necessary to survive the winter in one of the coldest parts of the continental United States. Even so, it's possible to hide much of this under other layers of clothing and maintain a markedly Somali appearance.

Teenage girls and women who have been living in the United States (or a third country such as Sweden or Germany) for several years generally wear more Western styles of dress. Long skirts, loose-fitting button-down shirts, turtlenecks, sweaters, and simple headscarves give an appearance that is modest but relatively mainstream. The *masar,* for example, is a scarf made from a single rectangle or triangle of cloth. It can be draped over the head and around the shoulders or worn in a style

Styles of Dress Worn by Somali Women in Minnesota

Cultural:
(names in Somali)
1. *garbasaar*
2. *dirac*
3. *gorgoro*
4. *shuka*

Religious:
(names in Arabic)
5. *hijab*
6. *jilbaab (jelaabib)*
7. *niqab*
8. *khimar*

Westernized:
(names in English)
9. *masar*
10. blouse
11. skirt
12. jeans

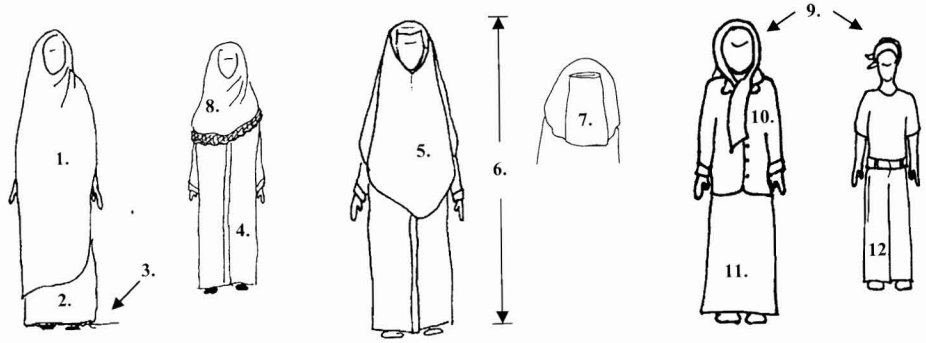

Figure 3.1. Styles of dress worn by Somali women in Minnesota. Drawings by Heather Marie Akou.

that resembles African-American head wraps. The second option is less common because it's not as modest (it doesn't cover the neck) and because many Somalis do not want to be viewed as African-Americans or even Africans. This is a very complex issue that stems from the slave trade in East Africa, colonization, and stereotypes of African-Americans.[27]

The second major style of dress (which is labeled "cultural" in figure 3.1) refers directly back to clothing worn in Somalia in the 1970s and '80s. In the first few years Somalis were living in Minnesota, it was not easy to obtain the appropriate material for outfits of garbasaar and dirac. Enterprising women who had just arrived from East Africa or were able to get a supply from relatives would go from door to door in the Somali community selling lengths of cloth to make these garments, sometimes for hundreds of dollars.[28] Viewed as a precious symbol of Somali history and identity, the garbasaar and dirac was a style of dress particularly sought after for weddings.

Cloth imported from East Africa, India, and Japan became more readily available when Suuqa Karmel (in Minneapolis) and the African International Marketplace (in St. Paul)—referred to as the "Somali malls"—were built in 2000 and 2001 respectively. Both are filled with small businesses (many of them run by women)

Figure 3.2. Somali women at a wedding celebration in Rochester. Photograph by Jodi M. O'Shaughnessy, *Rochester (Minn.) Post-Bulletin,* July 12, 2001. Reprinted courtesy of the *Post-Bulletin.*

selling everything from carpets, coffee, and platform shoes to Internet service, haircutting, and tailoring. Many of the shops are lined with rows of beautiful material for matching sets of garbasaar and dirac. Tailors can sew the garments within a few days or sometimes even on the spot. Also imported from the Middle East are the button-down overcoat known as shuka and the head covering called khimar. The shuka is becoming less common (probably because alternatives such as the garbasaar, the jilbab, and Western styles of dress have become more meaningful in the context of life in Minnesota), but the khimar is still very popular. Twenty years ago, this head covering was simply a triangle of cloth (or a square folded into a triangle) that was draped over the head and shoulders and sometimes pinned under the chin. A new tailored form comes prepackaged in two pieces—one that covers the hairline and a second one that fits closely around the face and falls over the shoulders. This new khimar is easy to wear and popular for children. Although the garbasaar and jilbab are generally not worn until puberty, it is not uncommon for Somali girls in Minnesota to begin wearing the khimar (along with a modest skirt and blouse) at age five or six when they start going to school.

The jilbab (one style of "religious" dress in figure 3.1) was not common in Somalia but has become quite popular in Minnesota. This is actually a set of three matching garments—a skirt, a masar that wraps around the hair, and a tailored head covering (sometimes called *hijab*) that fits closely around the face and drapes over the shoulders. The last piece can extend anywhere from the chest to the knees. Longer head coverings are more expensive (because they use more fabric), but they

project a more devout appearance. On a practical side, the jilbab is usually sewn from a plain-colored, opaque fabric, which is easily obtained at local fabric stores. This clothing is also easier to wear than the garbasaar (which is wrapped around the body and needs continual adjustment) as well as warm in the winter—it's easy to hide other layers of clothing, such as sweaters and coats, underneath. Older women who wear the jilbab often include a head covering called a *shash* instead of a plain masar. For Somali, Oromo, and Afar women who lived in the Horn of Africa in the 1800s and early 1900s, the shash was a gauzy piece of indigo or black fabric that a married woman would wear over a special hairstyle. Today, it still signifies that a woman is married, but the hair is hidden from view and the material itself is a black silk scarf with a printed design and is imported from India.

Many residents of Minneapolis–St. Paul can easily recognize the jilbab as religious or Muslim dress. It resembles the habit of Catholic nuns as well as clothing worn by the Iranian, Afghani, Iraqi, and Palestinian women who have appeared almost nightly in television news programs since the events of September 11, 2001. This is not just a coincidence. The jilbab reflects a renewed effort throughout the Muslim world to resist some of the devastating effects of globalization and create social and economic change through Islamism. Al-Itixaad, a Somali Islamist movement, has actively advocated the creation of a new national government based on Islamic law. It has also promoted the idea that Somali women should "wear the hijab and not merely traditional flimsy headscarves [i.e., the garbasaar]."[29] Over the last two decades, individuals and governments in countries as diverse as Turkey, the Sudan, and Malaysia have looked to clothing in Iran (which does have a government based on Islamic law) as a model for their own dress. This exchange of ideas has been facilitated by transnational migration. Oil money has allowed countries such as the United Arab Emirates and Qatar to build world-class universities that attract students from throughout the Middle East and to hire workers (ranging from professors to manual laborers and domestic servants) from all over the world.

At the same time, there are limits to what Somalis will actually wear. In the late 1990s, a small percentage of Somali women in Minnesota began wearing the *niqab,* a very conservative head covering that allows only the eyes to show. Although this garment is widespread in Saudi Arabia (another country with an Islamic government), since September 11th the niqab has virtually disappeared in Minnesota. Few are willing to risk being assaulted or targeted for discrimination because of this provocative head covering. Because the niqab covers all facial features but the eyes, it has also become nearly impossible to apply for a green card, passport, or driver's license while wearing it, and difficult to conduct business in secure buildings such as courthouses, banks, and airports.

Some Somalis also believe that the niqab and jilbab should be avoided because they represent a form of "Arabization"—a departure from their own culture that could be as damaging as Westernization. Recent photographs taken by journalists in East Africa have shown that some Somali women are wearing the jilbab, but many of my informants have insisted that Somalis *never* wore that style of dress before they came to the United States. They are intensely concerned that they could lose their culture—a common worry for refugees that is magnified for Somalis be-

cause of the unprecedented collapse of their nation. Although they readily identify themselves as Muslims, the centrality of Arab and Persian culture within Islam is a source of continual concern (not just for Somalis but also for other Muslims who are not Arab or Persian). These customs and styles of dress (such as the jilbab) are not a substitute for Somali ways of life. As Charles Geshekter has noted, "Despite strong links to the Arab world, Somalis do not consider themselves 'Arabs.'"[30] Some women are making a compromise between the jilbab and older forms of Somali dress by wearing a colorful, patterned skirt instead of a plain one. Others sew the jilbab using plain but colorful materials such as magenta and mint green polyester crepe. Although these garments are very similar to the Iranian *chador,* few Somalis wear the jilbab in black, navy blue, or gray—colors which in Iran represent austerity and mourning for relatives killed in the revolution and the war with Iraq.[31]

At the same time, the word *jilbab* has special meaning because it appears in the Qur'an. Verse 33:59 describes how the wives of the prophet Mohammed (and by extension, all Muslim women) should be dressed: "O Prophet! Tell thy wives and thy daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks [jilbab] round them (when they go abroad). That will be better, so that they may be recognized and not annoyed."[32]

As Somalis have renewed their focus on religion, communal prayers have become very important. More than a dozen new mosques have been built in the Twin Cities and celebrations for Ramadan fill the convention center in downtown St. Paul as well as an indoor soccer arena in one of the suburbs. More than ever, Somali women are getting an education and reading the Qur'an for themselves. Some have decided that the colorful, semi-transparent fabrics of the garbasaar and dirac are not modest enough for a proper Muslim woman. This belief is especially common among those who have come to believe that the loss of Somalia was a sign from God that Somalis were not being good enough Muslims.[33] Paying more attention to religion is a way of rebuilding their lives and hopefully the nation itself. A Palestinian teacher who had several Somali students in his classes told me he was a little unnerved at their intense devotion to certain religious practices. Students would rise from their desks and leave the room at the exact time for daily prayers, regardless of what the rest of the class was doing.[34]

> A woman's body is, in many instances, the property of her nation. She symbolically represents her nation and its political, religious, and cultural ideologies. [She] becomes an ambassador on duty for her nation.
>
> —Fagheh Shirazi, "Islamic Religion and Women's Dress Code"[35]

As might be expected during a civil war, there are many debates in the community concerning how Somalis should think and behave in order to build a new nation. Whether women will choose to wear cultural, religious, or Westernized styles of dress is not an idle question. Dress is a visual symbol that reflects and shapes personal and political attitudes, and their choices about it can shape the future of Somali nationalism and Somali identity. Even some men, who had been wearing more Western styles of dress, have consciously begun to grow beards and wear garments such as the saalwar qamis, *kufi* (a close-fitting cap), and *kaffiyeh* (a checkered shawl that has become a common political symbol in the Middle East).

For decades, Americans have assumed that new immigrants and refugees would go through a process of assimilation (or at least acculturation), gradually shedding the lifestyles of their homelands for a new set of thoughts, behaviors, and styles of dress. Although many may have followed this pattern, Somalis (so far) largely have not. Scholars should recognize that Somalis have a long history of interacting with people from other cultures and that dress has been absolutely central in shaping their political and cultural identity in the course of these interactions. What seems like "ethnic" or "traditional" dress in Minnesota is not just a quaint reminder of home. At the Somali malls, at celebrations, and in simply going about their ordinary activities, Somalis are not only keeping their memories alive but are also setting the stage for what will happen to their nation in the future.

Notes

1. Lourdes Medrano Leslie, "Immigration: Africans Find They 'Have Everything Here,'" *Minneapolis Star Tribune,* June 4, 2002, metro edition, B1.
2. This figure is based on community estimates. The number of Somalis in Minnesota continues to grow as individuals and families join friends and relatives from other countries and parts of the United States. Leslie Brooks Suzukamo, "Refuge and Renewal," *St. Paul Pioneer Press,* February 20, 2000, city edition, A1, A12–13; Kristin Tillotson, "Somalis Adapt to Life in a Strange Land," *Minneapolis Star Tribune,* March 22, 1998, A12; Leslie Brooks Suzukamo, "Somali Main Street," *St. Paul Pioneer Press,* April 24, 2000, Washington County edition, B1, B4.
3. Mary E. Fry, "Let Us Have a National Costume," *Ladies Repository* 16 (November 1856): 735.
4. Suzanne Baizerman, Joanne B. Eicher, and Catherine Cerny, "Eurocentrism in the Study of Ethnic Dress," *Dress* 20 (1993): 25.
5. Lou Taylor, *The Study of Dress History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 213–14.
6. William H. Schoff, trans. and annotated, *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea: Travel and Trade in the Indian Ocean by a Merchant of the First Century* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1912).
7. Abdi Ismail Samatar, *The State and Rural Transformation in Northern Somalia, 1884–1986* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 27.
8. Ioan M. Lewis, *Peoples of the Horn of Africa: Somali, Afar, and Saho* (Lawrenceville, N.J.: Red Sea, 1998), 131. See also Richard Burton, *First Footsteps in East Africa, or, An Exploration of Harar* (1856; reprint of the 1894 edition, New York: Dover, 1987), 170.
9. Lee V. Cassanelli, *The Shaping of Somali Society: Reconstructing the History of a Pastoral People, 1600–1900* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), 153.
10. Lewis, *Peoples of the Horn,* 132.

11. See, for example, photographs taken by the Italian anthropologist Enrico Cerulli for a series of books on Somalia published in 1957, 1959, and 1964, as well as photographs taken by Angela Fisher in the 1970s and early '80s for her *Africa Adorned* (New York: Harry Abrams, 1984).
12. Richard W. Beachey, "The East African Ivory Trade in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of African History* 8, no. 2 (1967): 267–90.
13. Abdi Sheik-Abdi, *Divine Madness: Mohammed Abdulle Hassan (1856–1920)* (London: Zed, 1992), 48.
14. Ibid., 58–59.
15. Samatar, *State and Rural Transformation,* 38.
16. Sheik-Abdi, *Divine Madness,* 197.
17. Ali Abdirahman Hersi, "The Arab Factor in Somali History: The Origins and Development of Arab Enterprise and Cultural Influences in the Somali Peninsula" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1977), 251.
18. For descriptions of Arab dress at that time, see Nancy Lindisfarne-Tapper and Bruce Ingham, eds., *Languages of Dress in the Middle East* (Surrey, U.K.: Curzon, 1997), as well as Yedida Kalfon Stillman, *Arab Dress: A Short History from the Dawn of Islam to Modern Times,* ed. Norman A. Stillman (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2000).
19. Virginia Lee Barnes and Janice Boddy, *Aman: The Story of a Somali Girl* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 155–56.
20. Michael Maren, *The Road to Hell: The Ravaging Effects of Foreign Aid and International Charity* (New York: Free Press, 1997), 38.
21. Field notes, September 2002.
22. Barnes and Boddy, *Aman,* 215.
23. Field notes, December 2002.
24. Nayereh Tohidi, *Iran and the Surrounding World: Interactions in Culture and Cultural Politics* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), 210.
25. Mohamed Diriye Abdullahi, *Culture and Customs of Somalia* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 2001), 118.
26. The central government of Somalia has yet to be legitimately replaced. The northern half of the country declared a return to sovereignty as Somaliland (formerly British Somaliland), but other countries have not yet recognized it as a new nation.
27. For further explanation, see Abdi Kusow, "Migration and Identity Processes among Somali Immigrants in Canada" (Ph.D. diss., Wayne State University, 1998); or Catherine Besteman, *Unraveling Somalia: Race, Violence, and the Legacy of Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).
28. Field notes, April 2001.
29. Rima Berns McGown, *Muslims in the Diaspora: The Somali Communities of London and Toronto* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 35.
30. Charles Geshekter, "The Death of Somalia in Historical Perspective," in *Mending Rips in the Sky: Options for Somali Communities in the 21st Century,* ed. Hussein M. Adam and Richard Ford (Lawrenceville, N.J.: Red Sea, 1997), 65–98.
31. Fagheh Shirazi, "Islamic Religion and Women's Dress Code: The Islamic Republic of Iran," in *Undressing Religion: Commitment and Conversion from a Cross-Cultural Perspective,* ed. Linda Arthur (Oxford, U.K.: Berg, 2000), 113–30.
32. Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Qurʾān: Text and Explanatory Translation* (Mecca: Muslim World League, 1977), 449.

33. Berns McGown, *Muslims in the Diaspora,* 80. See also Dianne Lynn Heitritter, "Meanings of Family Strength Voiced by Somali Immigrants: Reaching an Inductive Understanding" (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1999), 96.
34. Field notes, May 2001.
35. Fagheh Shirazi, "Islamic Religion and Women's Dress Code," 122.